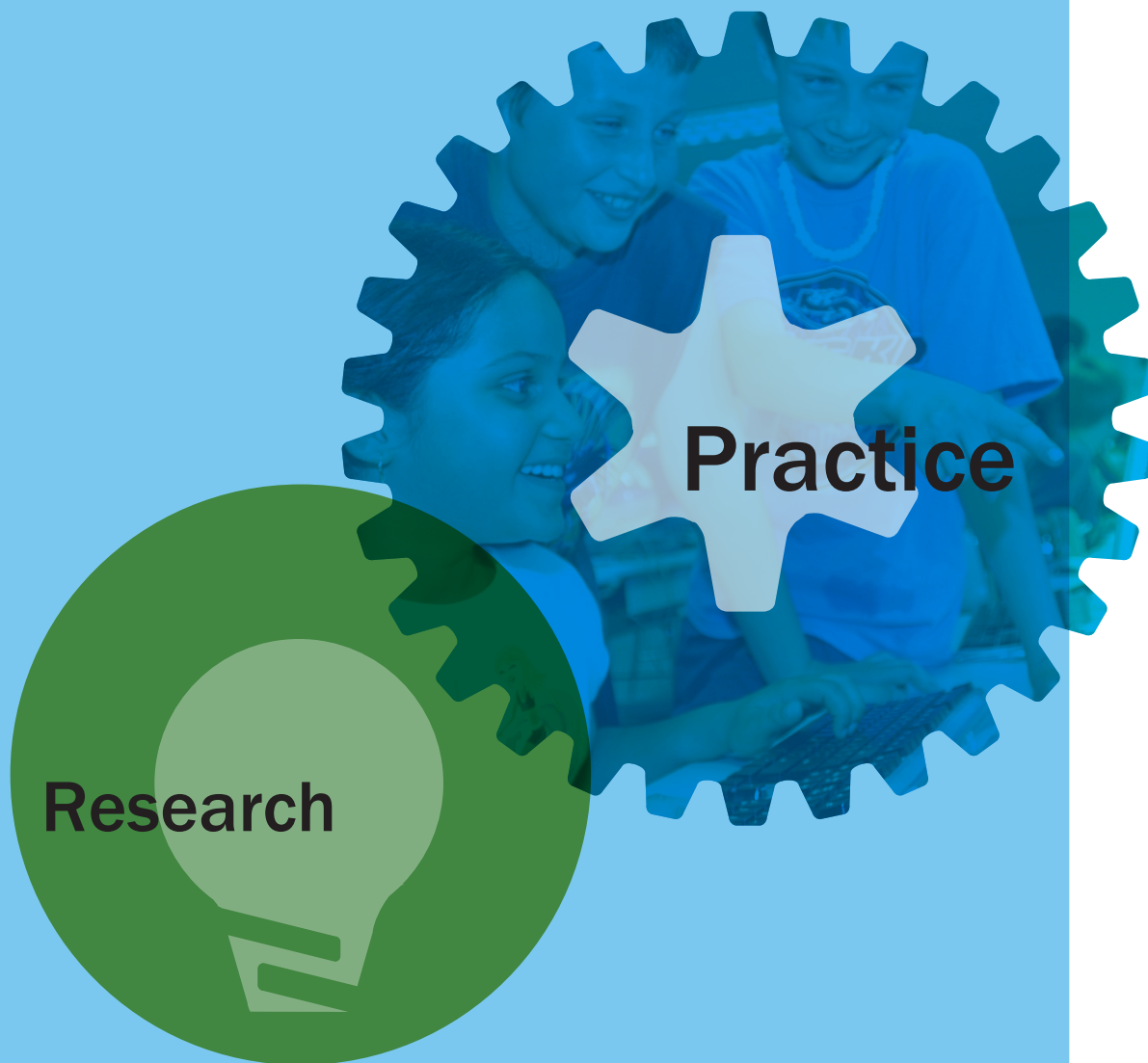


# Connecting RESEARCH About English Language Learners to PRACTICE

An Introductory Guide for Educators



HIGHLIGHTS research findings, policy and practice options, and resources | August 2009



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# Introduction

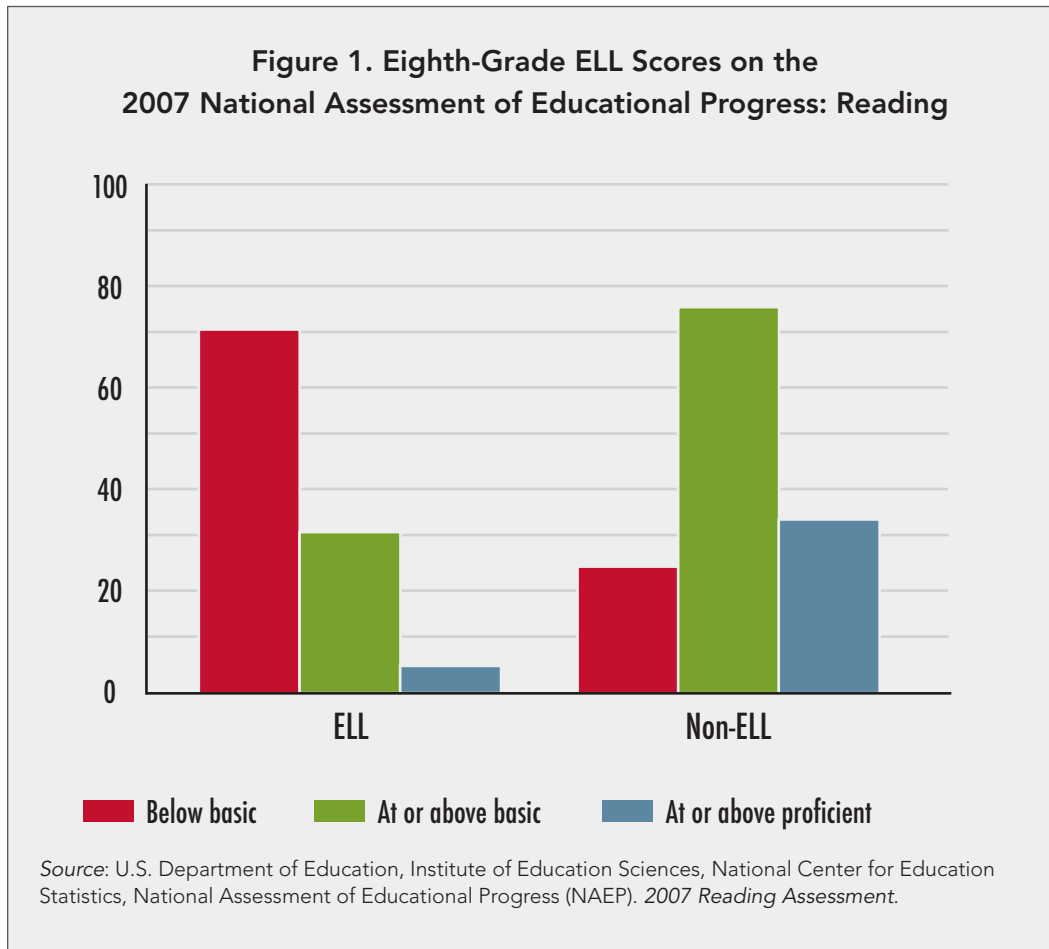
To help educators make informed decisions about English language learners (ELLs), this Connecting Research to Practice brief provides an overview of key research findings, highlights federal policies related to ELLs, outlines district-level and school-level action opportunities, and lists resources that offer more information.

English language learners, as defined by the federal government in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, are students 3–21 years old who are enrolled in elementary or secondary school but who do not speak, read, write, or understand English well enough to either (1) reach a proficient level on state achievement tests, (2) be successful in a classroom in which English is the language of instruction, or (3) fully participate in society. English language learners also are referred to as limited English proficient (LEP) students, but ELL is the more commonly used acronym because it has a more positive connotation.

The number of ELLs in the United States is increasing rapidly. Throughout the last decade, while the overall school population has grown by less than 3 percent, the number of ELLs has increased by more than 60 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 8). In 2006, more than 5 million ELLs were enrolled in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. It is interesting to note that the majority of these students were born in the United States (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2009).

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As the number of ELLs increases, school districts face a growing challenge to help ELLs both improve their English proficiency and meet the same high standards for academic achievement expected of all students. Currently, however, ELLs are not achieving at the same rates as their English-speaking peers. For example, Figure 1 depicts 2007 data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for eighth graders in reading. In 2007, although 76 percent of non-ELLs nationwide performed at or above basic levels (with 33 percent of those at or above proficient), only 30 percent of ELLs performed at or above basic levels (with only 5 percent of those at or above proficient). In order to prepare these students for the challenges of the global economy, educators must do more to meet their instructional needs.



# What Does the Law Say About ELLs?

Although most educators are familiar with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, which ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional, many are less familiar with the following laws and court decisions related to ELLs.

**Civil Rights Act (Title VI).** In 1970, the federal Office for Civil Rights issued a memo that interpreted Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination in programs receiving federal financial assistance, to mean that public schools have a responsibility to provide ELLs with equal educational opportunities and required school districts to “take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students” (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2009, FAQ 6).

***Lau v. Nichols* (1974).** This landmark Supreme Court decision ruled that students in public schools who could not understand English, the language of instruction, were being denied their civil right to an equal education. In 1975, the federal Office for Civil Rights announced the Lau Remedies to provide guidance for districts on the implementation of the Lau decision. In cases in which students had received an unequal education, districts were mandated to provide bilingual education.

***Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981).** This decision supported the provision in the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 that required school districts to take “appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” (Crawford, 2004, p. 127). The ruling outlined three criteria for district programs for ELLs: they must be based on sound educational theory, implemented with adequate resources and personnel, and evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.** In January 2002, NCLB became federal law. NCLB amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and consolidated the Bilingual Education Program into the new Title III State Formula Grant Program entitled “Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students.”

Provisions of both Title I and Title III of NCLB apply to ELLs. The goals of the law are to help ELLs improve their English language proficiency and prepare them to meet the same standards for academic achievement that all students are expected to meet.

Following are key provisions.

States must:

- Develop academic content standards and English language proficiency standards that are linked to the state content standards.
- Design valid and reliable assessments that are aligned with both the academic content and language proficiency standards.
- Disaggregate annual assessment data by subpopulations, one of which is ELLs.

Districts must:

- Administer a Home Language Survey and a language proficiency assessment to determine that the student speaks a language other than English at home and has limited proficiency in speaking, listening to, reading, or writing English.
- Administer annual English language proficiency state assessments that assess ELLs in the domains of speaking, reading, listening, and writing.
- Administer state assessments of academic content to all ELLs. However, ELLs who have attended schools in the United States for less than 12 months are exempt from one annual administration of the state reading/language arts assessment.
- Provide for ELLs high-quality language instruction educational programs that are informed by scientifically based research.
- Provide to educators who serve ELLs high-quality professional development that is of sufficient intensity and duration, informed by scientifically based research, and designed to improve the instruction and assessment of ELLs.
- Communicate to parents about educational programs for ELLs in a comprehensible manner.

Districts are held accountable for performance on three Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives that measure the extent to which ELLs make progress in English proficiency, attain English proficiency, and reach levels of proficiency on state assessments of academic content.

## Key Resource

- **National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs:**

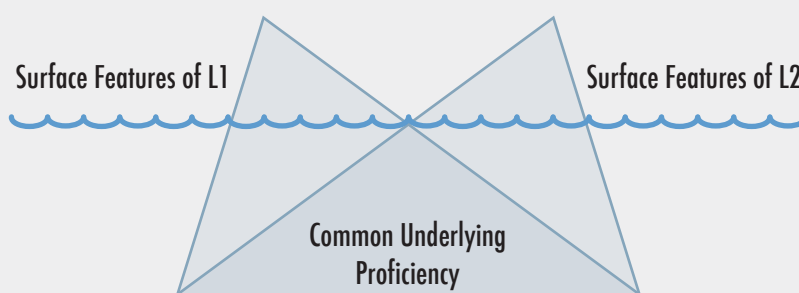
<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>

This helpful website is organized around the following five topics: English language proficiency standards and assessment; accountability; academic content standards and assessment; curriculum, instruction, and professional development; and Title III administration.

# What Theories and Research Findings About ELLs Are Important for Educators to Understand?

NCLB requires that schools help English language learners develop their English language proficiency skills at the same time that they provide grade-level content instruction for these students. What does the research say about helping ELLs learn grade-level content as they are learning English? This important question is informed by Cummins's (1992) model of the common underlying proficiency. The iceberg graphic in Figure 2 illustrates this model. Although the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) are separate above the surface level, the common underlying proficiency, below the surface level, represents the cognitive or academic proficiency that is common across languages. This means, for example, that if an ELL learned to perform basic arithmetic functions in Chinese, that student will not need to relearn how to add and subtract but will need to learn only the new English vocabulary associated with the concept that already has been mastered. It is important to note that the Cummins model, while supported by evidence from research, does not explain the full complexity of second language development.

**Figure 2. Dual Iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency**



Source: Cummins, J. (1983). Bilingualism and special education: Program and pedagogical issues. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 6(4), 373–386.



## Playground Language Versus Academic Language

Cummins (1992) also differentiated between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), the area above the surface level line, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), the area below the line. BICS, commonly referred to as playground language, usually is developed in children in their native language by the time they enter school. These language skills are needed for social conversation and typically involve a concrete context. On the other hand, CALP skills, or academic language, involve an abstract context and are related to the mastery of academic language that will enable students to be successful in school. ELLs can develop fluent BICS conversational English in two to three years, but grade-appropriate proficiency in CALP often requires at least five years (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). This distinction is important because ELLs who have mastered BICS may appear to be fluent in English. As a result, school leaders may exit these students from bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) support programs. However, because their CALP skills are not yet fully developed, ELLs may need additional ESL support in order to ensure that they make a successful transition to the mainstream classroom.

Themes related to the Cummins model resonate throughout many research studies about ELLs. The number of high-quality studies about ELLs is growing but remains quite limited. This brief cites only research of the highest quality. Much more rigorous research needs to be conducted to provide a deeper understanding of effective instruction for ELLs.

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To provide a synthesis of the highest quality research that currently exists, the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth was convened by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. The panel reviewed studies of second-language acquisition related to five topics: development of literacy, cross-linguistic relationships, sociocultural contexts and literacy development, instruction and professional development, and student assessment. The panel developed rigorous selection criteria when deciding which studies to review. For example, when drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of instructional approaches for ELLs, the panel decided to review only experimental or quasi-experimental

studies—rigorous research designs that yield strong evidence of what works. Using the selection criteria, the panel narrowed the studies from the 1,800 that were initially identified to the 293 studies that were both rigorous enough to meet the panel’s standards and relevant to their research questions. After conducting a thorough review of these studies, the panel identified two important conclusions that are strongly supported by the research (August & Shanahan, 2006):

- **Well-developed skills with oral proficiency and literacy in the native language can help students develop their literacy skills in English.** The panel found a great deal of evidence to support the Cummins model. Researchers found that

Well-developed skills with oral proficiency and literacy in the native language can help students develop their literacy skills in English.

strong English language proficiency skills were related to ELLs’ literacy skills in their native language. For example, well-developed word level, reading comprehension, and writing skills in the native language were linked to strong performance with the same skills in English. In fact, the research studies reviewed by the panel revealed that when ELLs were enrolled in bilingual programs that provided them with an opportunity to continue to develop their native language oral proficiency and literacy skills, students performed better, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than ELLs who received instruction only in English.

Thus, helping students to develop their literacy skills in their native language can improve their second language proficiency because skills such as reading comprehension and writing will transfer to the second language.

- **ELLs benefit from high-quality literacy instruction that both increases student’s oral proficiency in English and provides substantial coverage of the key components of literacy: phonemic awareness, decoding, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing.** Effective instruction for ELLs is, in many ways, similar to effective literacy instruction for native English speakers in that it covers the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. However, there are two important qualifications to this finding. First, instructional approaches that are effective with native English speakers, although also successful with ELLs,

have a smaller impact. Second, the research reviewed by the panel demonstrated that although ELLs, with appropriate instruction, can perform at the same level as native English speakers in word-level skills, such as decoding, they often fall behind on text-level skills, such as reading comprehension. Given this gap, it is important to note that well-developed oral proficiency in English is associated with more highly developed reading comprehension and writing skills in English. As a result, comprehensive literacy programs for ELLs should begin with high-quality literacy instruction that is successful with mainstream students but then go beyond this foundation to incorporate an ongoing and intensive focus on oral English development and to make other modifications that meet the needs of ELLs.

## Key Resource

- **Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE):**

<http://www.cal.org/create/>

This National Research and Development Center for English language learners, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, is conducting several rigorous studies to expand the empirical base of research about educating ELLs.

# District-Level Action Opportunities

Several studies have demonstrated that ELLs can learn to read in English at the same rate as their peers in the primary grades. Much of this evidence emerges from schools in Canada that provide intensive and systematic instruction for all children, supports for

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students who are struggling, and multiple opportunities for interactions that promote growth in oral proficiency (Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scarcella, 2007). To support the success of ELLs in a rigorous curriculum, district leaders should consider developing comprehensive programs that provide research-based instruction and a wide range of supports, including strong English language instruction. District leaders should consider the following action opportunities in developing effective districtwide programs that meet the needs of ELLs.

## **Become familiar with the federal and state policies related to educating ELLs.**

Policies about bilingual education vary widely across the country. For example, some states restrict the use of native language instruction for ELLs, while other states require it. Language proficiency standards and assessments also vary by state. In addition to reviewing state requirements about standards, assessments, and instruction, district leaders should ensure that they understand state policies related to teacher certification requirements, communication with parents, and the process for classifying students as ELLs and exiting them from bilingual or ESL support programs.

## **Determine which program model best fits the needs of ELLs and the available**

**district resources.** In designing instructional programs for ELLs, it is important to recognize that ELLs are a diverse population. They come to the United States from many different countries and represent a variety of cultures. Across the country, ELLs speak more than 400 different languages, with nearly 80 percent speaking Spanish (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. vii). However, districts vary in the diversity of their ELL populations—some serve only Spanish speakers, while others serve students who speak multiple languages. Districts with large numbers of ELLs who speak one language

might choose dual language or transitional bilingual programs, while sheltered instruction or ESL support models might be better options for districts with small numbers of ELLs or ELLs who speak multiple languages. Given district resources and the composition of their ELL population, district leaders should determine which of the following program models would best meet the needs of their students:

- **Dual language.** In contrast to other common program models for ELLs, dual language programs serve both students who speak English at home and students who speak another language at home. The goal, over time, is for both groups of students to become fully bilingual in both languages. Many of these programs split instructional time equally between English and the second language of instruction.
- **Transitional bilingual education.** The goal of this program model is to provide support for ELLs in their native language as they transition to classrooms in which English is the language of instruction. Students receive instruction in their native language in the core content areas as well as receiving instruction in English using ESL pedagogy. Over time, students transition from receiving the majority of their instruction in their native language to receiving most of their instruction in English.
- **Sheltered instruction.** These programs provide ELLs with support as they transition to mainstream classrooms. Instruction in the content areas is delivered in English, but teachers use simplified English, modified texts, visuals, demonstrations, and gestures to make the content more comprehensible for students who are developing their English language proficiency skills. Explicit instruction in English as a second language also is provided in this model.
- **ESL support.** ELLs are immersed in mainstream classes in which all of the instruction is in English. Students receive some support from an ESL teacher. ELLs either leave their mainstream classroom to attend a pull-out program for part of the day, or the ESL teacher will provide push-in services to support the student in the mainstream classroom. Typically, ESL support is not focused on the content areas but only on the development of general English language skills related to grammar, vocabulary, and communication.

- **Newcomer programs.** These are short-term transitional programs that help ELLs to develop basic English language proficiency skills, to overcome gaps in their content knowledge, and to become familiar with American schools and culture. These programs may be located at the home school of the students or in a separate location and may deliver content instruction either through the native language or with sheltered pedagogy.

**Consider individual differences of ELLs.** The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth found that individual differences impact English literacy development. As a result, the panel recommended that curriculum and instruction should be differentiated to meet ELLs' individual needs (August & Shanahan, 2006).

In addition to developing a schoolwide or districtwide instructional program model, education leaders should consider the individual differences of ELLs in making decisions about curriculum and instruction.

In addition to developing a schoolwide or districtwide instructional program model, education leaders should consider the individual differences of ELLs in making decisions about curriculum and instruction. ELLs vary widely in their educational background, age, motivation, socioeconomic status, literacy skills in their native language, and mastery of content knowledge. Some ELLs, often those who come to the United States as adolescents, have strong content knowledge and literacy skills in their native language but cannot yet converse fluently in English. These ELLs will need strong support in developing their English skills, but they can become high-performing students after they learn enough vocabulary to transfer what they already know into English. Other ELLs can converse easily in English but may lack content knowledge and strong literacy skills in either English or their native language. These students will need help with reading and writing in English as well as intensive support to overcome their gaps

in content knowledge. Still other ELLs may have experienced gaps in schooling because of civil conflicts or political crises in their home countries. In addition to intensive academic supports, these students may need counseling or other social or emotional support services.

**Invest in high-quality professional development for all teachers to support their work with ELLs and provide them with time to collaborate.** As the number of ELLs grows across the country, more and more mainstream classrooms include students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In fact, the percentage of teachers who had at least one ELL in their classroom tripled from 15 percent in 1992 to nearly 43 percent in 2002 (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003, p. 69). Although an increasing number of teachers need professional development focused on the needs of ELLs, only 29.5 percent of teachers with ELLs in their classes have the training to serve these students effectively (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008, p. 9). Ideally, teachers should receive high-quality professional development about second language acquisition, literacy development, sheltered instruction, the cultural diversity of ELLs, aligning instruction with language proficiency standards, using formative assessment data to guide instruction, and implementing research-based strategies that are appropriate for teaching reading, vocabulary, and academic English to ELLs. Teachers also need ongoing support to apply this training to their professional practice as well as time to work collaboratively with their colleagues to review the progress of ELLs and then to choose appropriate interventions and strategies that are linked to the strengths and weaknesses of their students.

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**Use a variety of data to place ELLs appropriately and inform their instruction.**

Appropriate placement of ELLs is essential to ensure that they receive the instruction and services that will prepare them for success in the future. In order to place ELLs in an appropriate program when they enter the district, school leaders should attempt to gather as much information as possible about the students' native language proficiency, native language education level, general educational experiences, English language proficiency, level of content knowledge, and social or emotional needs. Once ELLs have been appropriately placed, the district should try to provide teachers with tools and the support they need to conduct frequent formative assessments that provide information about the development of ELLs' reading and English language proficiency skills. Teachers can then work collaboratively with district leaders to analyze these data in order to identify students who require additional instructional support or interventions.

*Caution:* The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth found that most existing assessments do a poor job of providing high-

Research findings suggest that academic achievement measures that are normed for native English speakers have lower validity and reliability for ELLs.

quality information about the individual strengths and weaknesses of ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006). Thus, it is important to use assessments that are reliable and valid for ELLs. Research findings suggest that academic achievement measures that are normed for native English speakers have lower validity and reliability for ELLs. Assessment results may underestimate the level of ELLs' content knowledge because although students may understand the concept, they might not understand the English language in the assessment item about that concept. In fact, the test might be measuring students' language proficiency more than their knowledge of the content. As a result, school leaders need to ensure that ELLs are assessed in a way that separates language proficiency from content knowledge (Abedi, 2004).

**Provide ELLs with time to develop their skills with academic language and content in English.** In their review of the research, Genesee et al. (2006) found that ELLs who participated in bilingual programs for longer periods of time and with consistent instructional approaches performed better than students who received services for a short time or in an inconsistent manner. As a result, they recommend that districts provide ELLs with an appropriate amount of time to learn both social and academic language in English, to adapt culturally to their new environment, and to learn new academic content. This conclusion also is consistent with a finding from a recent report from the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands. The researchers found that, after controlling for student and school characteristics, ELLs' scores in reading and writing on the English language proficiency assessment were much stronger predictors of their scores in reading, writing, and mathematics on the statewide content assessment than were scores in listening and speaking on the English language proficiency assessment (Parker, Louie, & O'Dwyer, 2009). This finding suggests that ELLs who have strong listening and speaking skills may not be prepared to be successful in the mainstream curriculum. Instead, it may be more appropriate to use their reading and writing scores from the English language proficiency assessment, together with data from other sources, to predict more accurately when ELLs are ready to fully transition to the general education program.



## Key Resources

### **Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center:**

[http://www.aacompcenter.org/cs/aacc/print/htdocs/aacc/resources\\_sp.htm](http://www.aacompcenter.org/cs/aacc/print/htdocs/aacc/resources_sp.htm)

The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center is one of five National Content Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The “Special Populations” section of their website (under the Resources tab) features a variety of resources about assessments for ELLs.

### **Center for Applied Linguistics:**

[www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org)

The website of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) provides information about current CAL projects related to ELLs, available publications, resources, and professional development services designed for teachers who serve ELLs.

### **World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium:**

<http://www.wida.us/>

The WIDA Consortium has developed English language proficiency standards for ELLs and assessments that are aligned with those standards. These standards and assessments are currently used in 19 states. The website houses a variety of resources about the English language proficiency standards, aligned assessments, and professional development opportunities to support implementation of the standards.

# School-Level Action Opportunities

Teachers and school leaders should consider the following action opportunities in implementing effective instructional practices that meet the needs of ELLs.

**Provide ELLs with a variety of classroom supports to help them develop both their command of the content and their language proficiency in English.** The reviews of

the research related to educating ELLs suggest that what educators know about good

... what works for mainstream students should be a starting point in the development of a comprehensive literacy program for ELLs ...

instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs as well. As is the case with non-ELLs, ELLs also benefit from high expectations; clear goals and learning objectives; a challenging, content-rich curriculum; appropriately paced instruction that is informed by data from formative assessments; and opportunities to practice and apply new concepts and skills. However, what works for mainstream students should be a starting point in the development of a comprehensive literacy program for ELLs that incorporates an ongoing and intensive focus on oral English development to support the development of reading and writing skills in English. In addition, strategies that are successful with mainstream

students may need to be differentiated to take ELLs' varied levels of English proficiency into account (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2008).

Following are three important ways in which teachers can modify their instruction:

- **Comprehensible content.** Because much of the vocabulary in the classroom will be unfamiliar to ELLs, teachers must provide context to help them understand the content that the teacher is attempting to convey. In order to make the content more comprehensible, teachers can use a variety of scaffolding techniques, including simplifying language; modifying texts; repeating key points; frequently checking for understanding; and using a number of visual supports, such as objects, pictures, video images, graphic organizers, tables, graphs, timelines, maps, gestures, and demonstrations. In addition to using these types of supports to teach new concepts, teachers can help ELLs activate their prior knowledge as a strategy to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from their native language to English (Echevarria & Graves, 2003; Short, 1994; Short & Echevarria, 1999).

- **Native language support.** Another way for teachers to modify instruction for ELLs is to incorporate support in the student’s native language. A key finding of the reviews of the research related to educating ELLs suggests that teaching students to read in their native language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). The results are the same whether students are taught to read in their first language before learning to read in English or taught to read in both languages simultaneously. Although this finding may seem counterintuitive, in fact, the stronger the students’ literacy skills and content knowledge in their native language, the easier it will be to transfer those skills to English. This principle also is supported by Cummins’s (1992) model of the common underlying proficiency.

A key finding of the reviews of the research related to educating ELLs suggests that teaching students to read in their native language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English.

While researchers found that ELLs who were successful readers and writers in English used similar strategies in both their native language and in English, ELLs with weaker literacy skills in their native language were less able to transfer their native language reading skills to English. Furthermore, high-achieving ELLs take advantage of strategies that are not available to English-only speakers, such as transferring cognate knowledge from the native language to English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006). This finding suggests that ELLs with less developed English language proficiency skills may need additional support in developing their native language literacy skills and explicit instruction both to help them transfer reading strategies from their native language to English and to learn new strategies, such as using cognates, to improve their reading comprehension. Native language support can be provided by offering a transitional bilingual or dual language program, offering a bilingual paraprofessional in the mainstream classroom, making texts available in the ELLs’ native language, providing bilingual dictionaries, or forming cooperative groups of students who share the same native language so they can provide support for each other from time to time.

- **Intensive reading support.** If formative assessment data suggest that ELLs may be at risk for reading problems in English, school leaders should attempt to provide them with opportunities to receive additional direct instruction in intensive, structured sessions with small groups of students who have similar skill levels. The types of interventions provided and the amount of time in pull-out instruction should be linked to the identified gaps in student knowledge. Especially with emerging readers, interventions should address the five core reading elements: phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Gersten et al., 2007).

**Explicitly teach the language of academic English.** ELLs develop conversational English much more quickly than academic English. Although students typically learn

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social language through interaction with their peers, academic language must be taught explicitly and takes much longer. Academic English is the more abstract, decontextualized language of the classroom. This vocabulary includes transitional phrases (e.g., consequently), abstract terms (e.g., democracy), and content-specific words (e.g., ratio) that are used in textbooks, classroom instruction, and discourse in academic fields. ELLs may need intensive vocabulary instruction related to difficult

words in texts to facilitate comprehension, additional assistance with strategies such as summarization to improve comprehension, and extra practice in reading different types of academic texts (August & Shanahan, 2006). Research suggests that ELLs benefit when they receive intensive, explicit, high-quality instruction that embeds vocabulary words in a meaningful context, emphasizes “student-friendly definitions,” and provides students with multiple opportunities to review and practice these new words. Schools and districts should consider developing lists of essential vocabulary words from the core reading program and from texts used in core content areas. These lists might include 10–15 new words per week and could be used by teachers across the curriculum. In addition to a focus on academic English, teachers of ELLs may have to teach informal, social language and the meanings of common words, phrases, and expressions that ELLs have not yet learned but that are familiar to their English-dominant peers (Gersten et al., 2007; Goldenberg, 2008).

**Engage ELLs in structured cooperative learning activities.** Genesee et al. (2006)

found that participation of ELLs in interactive educational activities was related to an improvement in their reading and writing skills. As a result, teachers should consider providing ELLs with ample opportunities to participate in structured activities that allow them to interact and to learn collaboratively through discussion with their peers. These interactive activities provide students with opportunities to improve their speaking skills, to practice new vocabulary in a meaningful context, and to promote comprehension by engaging them in a discussion of the academic content (Echevarria & Graves, 2003; Goldenberg, 2008; Short & Echevarria, 1999). Gersten et al. (2007) specifically recommend that teachers of ELLs devote approximately 90 minutes per week to instructional activities in which pairs of students work together on academic tasks in a structured fashion that allows them to practice language structures and content-specific vocabulary that were previously taught. Goldenberg (2008) cautions that students should not simply be grouped together; instead, they should be engaged in instructionally meaningful activities and be able to participate at their level of English language proficiency. In structuring these cooperative groups, teachers might use scores from the annual English language proficiency assessment, together with data from other sources, to group students flexibly according to the goal of the activity and the students' proficiency levels in speaking, listening, reading, or writing. To further support the participation of all ELLs, teachers might consider preidentifying and teaching important language related to these interactive activities. In addition, expectations related to ELLs' participation in these activities should change over time based on their increasing English language proficiency.

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## Key Resources

- **Center on Instruction: English Language Learning Strand:**  
[http://www.centeroninstruction.org/resources.cfm?category=ell&subcategory=&grade\\_start=&grade\\_end=](http://www.centeroninstruction.org/resources.cfm?category=ell&subcategory=&grade_start=&grade_end=)  
The Center on Instruction is one of five National Content Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Its English Language Learning Web page features a variety of resources for learning more about curriculum, instruction, and assessment for ELLs.
- **Doing What Works: English Language Learners:**  
[http://dww.ed.gov/priority\\_area/priority\\_landing.cfm?PA\\_ID=6](http://dww.ed.gov/priority_area/priority_landing.cfm?PA_ID=6)  
This interactive website is organized around the five research-based recommendations contained within the Practice Guide published by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education (*Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide*: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/20074011.pdf>). For each of the five recommendations in the guide, the website houses information and resources designed to help educators learn what works, see how it works, and do what works.
- **What Works Clearinghouse: English Language Learners:**  
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/topic.aspx?tid=10>  
The What Works Clearinghouse is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education. This website features reviews of the rigor of the research evidence supporting interventions for ELLs in the areas of reading achievement and English language development.

# Resources From the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Network

## **New Measures of English Language Proficiency and Their Relationship to Performance on Large-Scale Content Assessments**

*By Caroline E. Parker, Josephine Louie, and Laura O'Dwyer*

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL\\_2009066.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2009066.pdf)

Using assessment results for fifth-grade and eighth-grade ELL students in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont, this report from REL Northeast and Islands finds that the English language domains of reading and writing (as measured by an English language proficiency assessment) are significant predictors of performance on reading, writing, and mathematics content assessments and that the domains of reading and writing (literacy skills) are more closely associated with performance than are the English language domains of speaking and listening (oral skills).

## **Preparing to Serve English Language Learner Students: School Districts with Emerging English Language Learner Communities**

*By Annette M. Zehler, Carolyn Adger, Cate Coburn, Igone Arteagoitia, Krystal Williams, and Louis Jacobson*

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?ProjectID=151>

This report from REL Appalachia aims to help school districts that are experiencing significant growth of their ELL student population. The authors highlight challenges and helpful resources for districts.

## **Registering Students From Language Backgrounds Other Than English**

*By Nicole Marcus, Carolyn Temple Adger, and Igone Arteagoitia*

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/pdf/REL\\_2007025.pdf](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/pdf/REL_2007025.pdf)

This report from REL Appalachia seeks to alert administrators, school staff, and database managers to variations in the naming systems of other cultures; to help these staff accommodate other cultures and identify students consistently in school databases; and to provide information on other cultures' naming conventions and forms of address to assist schools in registering students from other cultures appropriately.

## Resources From Learning Point Associates

### **Quick Key 5—Understanding the No Child Left Behind Act: English Proficiency**

[www.learningpt.org/pdfs/qkey5.pdf](http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/qkey5.pdf)

This booklet from Learning Point Associates is designed to assist educators, administrators, and policymakers in understanding the fundamentals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act for limited English proficient programs and students.

### **Serving Recent Immigrant Students Through School-Community Partnerships**

*By Rakeda Leaks and Robert M. Stonehill, Ph.D.*

[www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter\\_NL\\_Feb08.pdf](http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_Feb08.pdf)

The February 2008 newsletter of The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement examines how district and school partnerships with community-based organizations can help schools to better meet the needs of students who are recent immigrants.



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# Connecting RESEARCH About English Language Learners to PRACTICE

An Introductory Guide for Educators

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## About Learning Point Associates

Learning Point Associates is a nationally recognized nonprofit consulting organization with 25 years of experience. In partnership with our clients, we apply research, evaluation, and direct practice to impact policy and tackle the most pressing issues in education today.

We move research from the shelf into the everyday practice of educators by leading and facilitating critical conversations. We are skilled at fostering the exchange of knowledge across ideologies and roles to ensure that fresh ideas and the latest research are injected into the national conversation on education.

Our Connecting Research to Practice events bring research to the field, providing opportunities for practitioners and policymakers to deepen their understanding of evidence-based research. For more information about connecting research to practice, please visit <http://www.learningpt.org/rel/events.php>.

Our Connecting Research to Practice policy briefs are designed to help educators make informed decisions about investing in programs to improve student achievement. Highlights of each policy brief include key research findings, policy and practice options, and resources for practitioners.

